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SUBJECT: NICARAGUA ELECTIONS: OFFICIAL CAMPAIGN SEASON  
BEGINS

11. (U) Summary: Nicaragua's Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) launched the official campaign season with a ceremony on August 18. CSE president Roberto Rivas used the occasion to admonish observer groups and remind the public that the CSE is the final arbiter of the November 5 national elections. On August 20, the Liberal Constitutional Party (PLC) staged a large rally in the town of Sebaco, which was not attended by PLC leader Arnoldo Aleman or his family. The Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN), Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), and Alternative for Change (AC) parties held smaller gatherings in rural areas. In a departure from previous campaign seasons, the Sandinista Front (FSLN) has decided to focus on door-to-door campaigning rather than a giant rally. End Summary.

CSE Formally Opens Campaign Season  
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12. (U) The Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) marked the formal opening of the electoral campaign season with a ceremony on August 18. The CSE magistrates presided, with representatives from the political parties, GON, Supreme Court, armed forces, police, diplomatic corps, and other observers. All presidential candidates were present except Edmundo Jarquin (MRS) and Daniel Ortega (FSLN), who sent campaign manager (and wife) Rosario Murillo in his place.

13. (SBU) Notably, the CSE chose retired Archbishop of Managua, Cardinal Miguel Obando y Bravo, to deliver the opening remarks. (Comment: Obando, aside from being officially "retired," is now regarded as a supporter of the FSLN. Many regarded his presence on stage with the CSE magistrates as highly inappropriate given his status as a Catholic Church prelate and his political affiliations. End Comment.) CSE president Roberto Rivas gave the principal address, in which he praised Obando y Bravo for his commitment to Nicaraguan democracy and his CSE colleagues for their "professional and objective" efforts. Rivas announced that the CSE will open dozens of cedula stations in Managua on August 19 to attend citizens that have not yet applied before the deadline -- he commented that the CSE has registered "very few citizens in relation to the massive numbers that some claim lack cedula." Glaring at the OAS delegation, Rivas sternly reminded the audience that the CSE is in charge of the electoral process, not observer groups.

PLC Opens Campaign in Sebaco, Aleman and Family Absent  
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14. (U) The PLC officially opened their campaign in Sebaco,

Matagalpa on August 20 with thousands of supporters and a strong, anti-FSLN message. Former president Arnaldo Aleman and his family were conspicuously absent. (Comment: According to the Rizo campaign, Aleman's absence is "proof" that Aleman does not control the party and that he and his family are complying with the various requests from Rizo's supporters to distance themselves from the presidential campaign. End Comment.)

15. (U) PLC presidential candidate, Jose Rizo, declared himself 'anti-pacto' and promised to free Nicaragua from the grip of the FSLN by breaking the hold of the pact. He invoked strong words against FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega, declaring that he hopes that Ortega will resign from Nicaraguan politics after losing the upcoming election. Rizo used ALN candidate Eduardo Montealegre's own campaign slogan "sowing opportunities" to criticize him, saying he would only "sow opportunities for other bankers." PLC vice presidential candidate Jose Antonio Alvarado claimed that Rizo is "untouched by scandal," unlike front-runners Ortega (the pinata) or Montealegre (Cenis). PLC sources claimed that 250,000-300,000 people attended the rally, with many supporters brought in using 3,000 buses, but actual turnout was probably 30,000-50,000.

ALN, MRS, and AC also Open Campaigns in Rural Regions  
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16. (U) The ALN, MRS, and AC also opened their campaigns on August 19 and 20 with reasonable turnout and strong messages. ALN candidate Eduardo Montealegre was found dancing with a traditional dancer at his opening in Bluefields on the Atlantic Coast, where he vowed to beat Ortega in November. He said that the FSLN and the PLC represent "the past, misery, corruption, and war." Montealegre and running mate

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Fabricio Cajina visited Bluefields, Laguna de Perlas, and Corn Island during their Atlantic Coast tour, pledging to devote more time and attention to the neglected region, should Montealegre win the Presidency. (Note: The ALN is also planning a rally in Managua on August 27. End Note.)

17. (U) Although the MRS and AC did not plan official campaign events, MRS candidate Edmundo Jarquin opened his campaign in the northwestern department of Chinandega, where he plans to visit 60 percent of the municipalities in that department. AC candidate Eden Pastora opened the AC campaign in Rivas. Pastora plans to present the AC government plan on August 22 in Managua.

18. (SBU) FSLN campaign manager Rosario Murillo announced to the public that the FSLN will not hold a traditional rally to launch their campaign, rather, the party will focus on "personal" door-to-door campaigning, a "pilgrimage to the people" in Murillo's words. (Comment: The FSLN has been mocked in the past for "filling the plazas, but not the voting booths," and Ortega suffered strong criticism for his July 19th appearance at the Anniversary of the Sandinista Revolution wearing the Nicaraguan flag and riding into the park on a horse, a scene reminiscent of the former Somoza dictatorship. End Comment.)

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